

I want to talk to you about Jesus. My *descendant* Jesus. Did you know Jesus was my descendant? Matthew, the genealogist records this. I am his 25th great grandfather.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus grew up with James. And James writes quite a bit like me. So actually, I want to talk to you about James.

James grew up in a family that loved reading my writings and those of my father, King David. In fact, James loved our writings so much that he even writes quite a bit like us. His personal history is much better than mine. Fortunately.

God blessed me by making me the wisest man who ever lived. Many people know this. Unfortunately, that didn't keep me from being foolish, as well, although it should have. 700 wives of royal birth and 300 concubines, nobody knows more about foolishness than me. And that's just one example. Against the rules of Moses, I piled up massive heaps of gold and silver, and collected horses and chariots from Egypt.<sup>2</sup> And those follies just led a long, long list of others. That could have been avoided if I had simply listened to the greatest prophet of the Jews, Moses.

Many centuries before Israel had kings or even thought about having kings, Moses gave three very clear commands that any king of Israel should follow.<sup>3</sup> A king must not accumulate large amounts of gold and silver. With the help of my father David, I piled up such massive heaps of gold and silver that silver was considered as common as rocks.<sup>4</sup>

Moses said that a king must not acquire great numbers of horses and must not make the people return to Egypt to get more. The horses of Egypt were the best, God knew that, but the temptations of Egypt were vast, God knew that, too. I collected so many horses that I had to build cities to house them. And you can bet, many of these horses and chariots were from Egypt.

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<sup>1</sup> Mat 1:17 says there were 27 generations from Solomon to Jesus

<sup>2</sup> Deut. 17:16-17

<sup>3</sup> Deut. 17:16-17

<sup>4</sup> 1 Kings 10:27

Most importantly, Moses commanded that a king should not take many wives, or his heart would be led astray. I violated that command in an extraordinary way. I took 700 wives of royal birth and 300 concubines.<sup>5</sup> Many of those wives worshiped foreign gods, and I let them lead me into idolatry. Worse, I was the primary cause that so many Jews became idolatrous. My actions led directly to the downfall of Israel. No one was more foolish than me.

I wrote many wise sayings about folly, fortunately for you, and compiled them in the books you know as *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes*. Read and learn them as James did so you can avoid my mistakes. That's my recommendation, anyway.

One of the craziest things about the Bible is that it talks about its heroes' follies. Stories that would have been killed by any good marketing group today. But God knew that learning from people's mistakes was as important as learning from their wise choices. The history of the early church was replete with both wise choices and foolish choices.

As an example, here is a short list of huge follies that you can spot if you read just the first five chapters of Dr. Luke's church history book of *Acts*:

- The betrayal of Jesus by Judas, which was compounded by Judas' suicide
- The people who did not believe Peter on Pentecost, or the other times he preached or healed people
- The Sanhedrin who refused to believe Peter, but persecuted the Christians instead
- Ananias and Sapphira trying to deceive the Holy Spirit

People have an incredible capacity to be foolish. James, warned of foolishness in at least specific six areas. It is no stretch to think that he might have been thinking of me when he wrote some of his letter, because I exemplified all six.

*It is foolish to be materialistic.* But the rich man should be humble since he will pass away as a flower of the grass. For the sun rises with burning heat and burns up the grass and the flower on it. Likewise, the rich man will fade away while he is doing his business.<sup>6</sup>

Pay attention, you rich men. Weep and howl for your miseries that will certainly happen to you. Your wealth has rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and the rust on them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as if it were fire. You have piled up treasure for the end.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Kings 11:3-4

<sup>6</sup> James 1:10-11

<sup>7</sup> James 5:1-6

*It is foolish to doubt God.* For don't let a doubting man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.<sup>8</sup>

*It is foolish to blame God for our bad actions.* Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he doesn't tempt anyone. But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.<sup>9</sup>

*It is foolish to yield to Satan and his worldly temptations.* You adulterers and adulteresses, don't you know that friendship with the world means you are an adversary of God? Whoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.<sup>10</sup>

*It is foolish to create strife and division.* What is the source of the fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your lusts that battle inside of you?<sup>11</sup>

*And finally, it is foolish to be self-centered.* For where there is envy and strife, there is confusion and all kinds of evil.<sup>12</sup>

You desire, but don't have: you kill and desire to have, but cannot get what you want: you fight and quarrel, yet you don't get your way, because you ask with the wrong motives. You ask and don't receive because you ask with wrong intentions, that you may consume it all on your own desires.<sup>13</sup>

But now you rejoice in your arrogant boasting, even though such boasting is evil. Therefore, to him that knows to do good and doesn't do it, to him it is sin.<sup>14</sup>

The short letter by James was maybe the first of the New Testament writings. As you have heard in my story and in other stories, James was dealing with the practicalities of living by talking about faith, obedience, suffering, community, wisdom and foolishness. Through the centuries, countless Christians chose to find solutions to their life problems in his little letter. Maybe if he had written it a thousand years earlier, I would have learned from it. Nah! I was the wisest man that ever lived and I wouldn't even learn from myself, I was too prideful.

May nothing keep you from learning from James.

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<sup>8</sup> James 1:7-8

<sup>9</sup> James 1:13-14

<sup>10</sup> James 4:4

<sup>11</sup> James 4:1

<sup>12</sup> James 3:16

<sup>13</sup> James 4:2-3

<sup>14</sup> James 4:16-17